



“Better Read” by Jacob Shaddock
1st Place, Short Play 16-18

Better Reads 1

Chris: A twenty-something man.

Allison: A twenty-something woman.

Lights up on a quaint little bookstore with shelves that make a U shape open towards the audience. Allison and Chris skim through the books independently of one another until they try to grab the same book in the middle.

Chris: (surprised) Oh!

Allison: (also surprised) Oh!

Allison: You can go ahead, I mean, you were first, that is.

Chris: No, by all means, it's a... a gift for my niece, I'm not gonna read it.

Allison: Me neither! Gosh, I was just looking to see if they had it as a joke.

Chris: There are infinitely more intellectually valuable things to read.

Allison: Dostoyevsky.

Chris: Faulkner.

Allison: Swift.

Chris: Patterson-

Allison: Patterson?

Chris: Ah! Uh... gotcha!

A forced laugh.

Allison: Well then, I'll be on my way now...

Chris: Sure, sure, me too, no need to waste time on this "literature."

Allison: Right?

Chris: Right... Do you know where I can find the... (searching for something to make him sound intelligent) where the... Shakespeare... would be?

Allison: Probably with the plays, under "S."

Chris: Naturally.

Allison: Yes... well... goodbye then.

Chris: Bye, now.

Allison: Bye.

The two walk away. Once they're out of sight of one another, they sneak back around without seeing each other until they grab the same book again.

Allison: You here!

Chris: Fancy that!

Allison/Chris: I was just-/Yeah, I was-

They both pause to let the other one continue.

Allison: You first.

Chris: I'm back because i-i-if you aren't gonna get it-

Allison: Never.

Chris: If you don't want it, then... I... should probably grab it for my... sister? For the birthday?

Allison: I thought you said it was your niece-

Chris: And you! You were saying?

Allison: *I* was just coming back to see if some other *bozo* was gonna grab it.

Chris: Uh huh.

Allison: Yeah.

Chris: I think I'm gonna grab this for my little cousin now-

Chris reaches for the book and Allison steps in front of it

Allison: *(desperately)* Are you sure she'll even want it?

Better Reads 3

Chris: Of course she will, the prose and the illustrations are breathtaking, and this is supposed to be the best in the series-

Allison: Best in the series? That's very bold considering how strong the last two were! *surely* this can't be better than when Jasmine dumped Louis-

Chris: Then regretted it and-

Both: Blamed it on her star sign!

Realization sets in.

Chris: Or at least, that's what my niece told me anyway...

Allison: I just read the wikipedia summaries to make myself laugh.

Chris: Of course.

Allison: Sure... but, seeing as this is the newest, the wikipedia summary isn't out yet-

Chris: Uh-huh.

Allison: Because it isn't out yet, I figured it would be a *hoot* and a holler to get the full experience myself!

Chris: I see.

Allison: So, I'll just...

Allison grabs for the book, and Chris steps in the way.

Chris: But my niece really *really* wants it, she's been waiting for the last seven months, three weeks-

Allison: (*exasperated*) seven months, three weeks, five days, thirteen hours, and forty-eight seconds, can't she wait just a little longer?

Chris: No, she can't, so I'm grabbing this now-

Chris and Allison grab the book at the same time and wrestle for it.

Allison: I want it!

Chris: I want it *more!*

Allison: Give it to me!

Chris: I was here first!

Allison: No... you... weren't!

They both pull so hard that they rip the book in two and fall onto the floor. There's a second of shocked silence.

Chris: You... have just *ruined* an eleven-year-old's birthday gift.

Allison: "Birthday gift," yeah right!

Chris: You have *far* too much emotional stake in this. Didn't you say that you were a fan of Swift?

Allison: Yeah.

Chris: Then what's your favorite?

Allison: ...You belong with me?

Chris: Good god!

Allison: Now you look me in *my* face and tell me that you aren't buying this for you.

Chris looks everywhere but her face.

Chris: It's for my-

Allison: *Eye contact!*

Chris: It's for... my... self. You?

Allison: ...Me too...

The truth at last! They relax as the tension leaves their bodies. Chris holds up his half of the book.

Chris: But this.

Allison: This.

Chris: We can't just put it back. It has to be paid for.

Allison: Halfsies?

Chris: Technically, *you* pulled it and I was here first-

Allison: Halfsies.

Chris: Fine. So, you have the first half...

Allison: You have the second...

Chris: Which means if you read it fast-

Allison: We can switch halves-

Chris: Then switch again when I read it. Book club?

Allison: Book club. Let's take it up to pay.

Chris gasps.

Allison: What?

Chris: What do we say to the checkout ladies?

Allison: Well... you could have been grabbing it... for your niece, that is...

Chris: When I dropped it and you picked it up and made a joke about how bad it is...

Allison: That you fervently laughed at and agreed with...

Chris: But as you were handing it back, and both of our hands were on it...

Both: Both of us sneezed and lurched back, ripping the book in half!

Chris: Or... we could just say that we got into a baby fight over a tween's book and ripped it.

Allison: (*Defeated*) You're right. We should suck it up.

Chris: Bite the bullet.

Allison: Rip off the band-aid. (*A beat*) But first, let's stop by "F" to pick up a couple copies of Gatsby to offset it.

Chris: Sure thing.

They start to leave. Lights fade as they exit.

Chris: Do you think Jasmine will try to justify it or own up?

Allison: It really depends this time, because she's not gonna say jack while mercury's in retrograde.

Chris: Sure, Sure.

Lights down. End of play.